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## FORTUNE'S WHEEL AND BOETHIUS

Mr. Stanley L. Galpin's letter in *Modern Language Notes* for February (pp. 62-63), quoting the passage from the Old French poem *Les Échecs Amoureux* concerning Fortune's wheel, is interesting but gives rise to some objections and comment. He speaks of the poet "advising people to shun the periphery which moves so fast, and to remain as close as possible to the hub where the motion is much less." He considers this the "application of centrifugal force to the wheel of Fortune."

First, it is evident from the passage he quotes that there is no reference to the "centrifugal force" of the wheel at all. People are not scattered to the rim; there is no emphasis on the difficulty of getting to the center. Secondly, we are not by any means sure that the whole wheel is really under the dominion of Fortune. The person who wishes to escape from the perils of the world where Fortune reigns, is advised to seek the center of this wheel, where, presumably, Fortune does not reign. At the rim, to be sure, there is plenty of "whirling up and down," but at the center is peace and "vertu." This is enough to recall to mind a parallel conception that Mr. Galpin himself may have had in mind but did not wish to include in his short note. I refer to the familiar figure of the wheel of Fate and Providence in Boethius (*Cons. Phil.*, Bk. IV, pr. VI, 61-77, ed. Peiper). The parallel is even more striking when one takes into consideration the gloss found on this passage in a Latin commentary in a manuscript of the late tenth or eleventh centuries, and doubtless as early as the latter part of the ninth century, since it was used by Alfred. (Scholia of Monacensis 19452 Saec. X-XI to IV pr. VI 110, 61 ff. Zu König Alfreds 'Boethius,' Dr. Georg Schepss. *ASNS.*, 94, 153. Alfred's expansion and development of the passage is suggestive.)

In neither of the parallel passages above referred to, is there a substitution of Fortune for Fate, and so they differ essentially from the Old French treatment. On the other hand,

Fate is not so clearly distinguished from Fortune in Boethius that a poet could not easily substitute the one for the other if he was not interested in philosophical distinctions. In this same section there are several references to the abstract *fortuna*. In the same book (pr. VII) Boethius almost suggests the "Christian Fortune"; that is, fortune is governed by God and is not so haphazard after all—or, not so different from fate. Again, in the passage with the figure of the wheel, Fate seems particularly changeable.

In the Old French poem, Fortune was wanted rather than Fate because she was more familiar; because she was needed in another place for the "conventional" treatment; and because she was useful for the emphasis on the *changeable* element. Fortune and the wheel were the usual combination in poetry: let it be "sa roe" once more. If the wheel-figure of Boethius were very well known, real power came into the lines:

Fuye dont l'extremite telle,  
Et pense de vertu ensuivre.

The poet could, of course, find the passage in Jean de Meun's translation of Boethius.

While this discussion disagrees with Mr. Galpin's interpretation of the Old French treatment, it does not in the least derogate from the uniqueness of the example in Old French poetry.

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 ATALAYA DE LA VIDA HUMANA

"Esto mismo le sucedió á este mi pobre libro, que habiéndolo entitulado: Atalaya de la vida humana, dieron en llamarle Pícaro, y no se conoce ya por otro nombre." These words occur in the second part of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (libro I, cap. VI), and their meaning has long been a subject of conjecture. It does not seem likely that Alemán can be referring to an edition earlier than that of Várez de Castro, Madrid, 1599; consequently, some other explanation must be sought.

Rodríguez Marín thinks that Alemán did not write the subtitle, but that his words are due to a lapse of memory: "Trascordábase Mateo Alemán en cuanto á lo primero, pues no llamó *Atalaya de la vida humana* sino á la parte segunda de su novela; pero en lo otro decía fielmente lo sucedido: que no bien salieron á correr mundo los ejemplares de la primera edición, *el Pícaro* llamaron al protagonista y al libro cuantos saborearon la deleitable historia."<sup>1</sup>

In the introduction to *The "Sucesos" of Mateo Alemán* I mentioned an explanation of Alemán's statement given me by Dr. F. De Haan,<sup>2</sup> whose words I now quote in full: "The explanation of Alemán's remark would seem to be that he had written on the title page of his ms. '*Atalaya*,' etc., and that the publishers removed this in order to make the book's title sound more attractive to the public."

Perhaps a step in the direction of settling this question may be taken by reference to the *Privilegio* found in the copy of the first edition of *Guzmán de Alfarache* owned by the Hispanic Society of America. This *Privilegio*, printed under the rubric *El Rey*, contains these words: "nos fue fecha relacion, que vos auia des cõpuesto vn libro, intitulado Primera parte de la vida de Guzman de Alfarache, atalaya de la vida humana, del qual ante los de nuestro Consejo hizistes presentacion." Apparently the title was quoted exactly from the manuscript in hand, but if we turn to the title page, we find it reads simply *Primera parte de Guzman de Alfarache*. When nearly a year later (March 4, 1599) a copy of the book fresh from the press reached the hands of Gonçalo de la Vega the escribano, in order that he might make out the Tassa, he says that he has seen "un libro intitulado *Primera parte de Guzman de Alfarache*."

The word '*Pícaro*' occurs in the *Aprobación* given by Fray Diego Davila on Jan. 13, 1598, where he refers to the book as *Primera parte del Pícaro Guzman de Alfarache*, and also in the dedication in which Alemán himself speaks

of the "*desechado Pícaro*." The three other editions of 1599, as well as several of those that follow, insert the word *pícaro* on the title page, much to the regret of the author.

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### THE *Sagittary* OF *Othello*

The commentators say that *Sagittary* of *Othello* I, i, 173; I, iii, 136, is either the name of an inn, or the official residence of the army and navy commanders in the Arsenal at Venice. The second suggestion is impossible from references in Scene ii. *Othello* is just outside Desdemona's hiding place, "being not at his lodging to be found." He refers also not to an inn but to "a house": "I will but spend a word here in the house." This house is precisely in the *Sagittary*, for Brabantio is brought there, true to appointment made in Scene ii. As regards Scene iii, the Ancient would be no better qualified than anyone else to find the Arsenal, or a public inn.

*Sagittary* is simply an Anglicized form of *Frezzaria*, 'street of the arrow-makers,' next to the Merceria the most important street in the San Marco quarter of Venice. Any description of Venice would have furnished Shakespeare with the term.

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### CHAUCER'S SERPENT-PIT

To the numerous references to pits filled with serpents collected by Professor Tatlock (*Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXIX, 99-100) to illustrate Chaucer's legend of Cleopatra, may be added another, which occurs in many collections of Miracles of Our Lady. In the Vendome *Miracles de la B. V. M.*, preserved in a manuscript of the thirteenth century this tale bears the title: "De quodam qui uidit puteum plenum serpentibus."<sup>1</sup> In this case the person who beholds this terrifying vision is a young man from Germany on a visit to Clairvaux. Ac-

<sup>1</sup> *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia Española el día 27 de octubre de 1907.* Sevilla, 1907, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue Hispanique*, no. 68, page 359.